

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FRESHWATER SPONGES STUDIED FOR ENDANGERED OR THREATENED STATUS

The status of seven of the 30 species of freshwater sponges in the United States will be reviewed to determine if they should be listed as endangered or threatened species, Director Lynn A. Greenwalt of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The sponges to be reviewed are the muscular sponge in Michigan; the Carolina and spongy sponges in South Carolina; the Oklawaha sponge in Florida and Mexico; the Kissimmee sponge in Florida; the Pennsylvania sponge in Pennsylvania; and the Oneida sponge in New York. A notice of the review was recently published in the Federal Register.

Sponges are among the simplest forms of animal life protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Act directs the Department of the Interior, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to determine the status of those plants and animals which scientific evidence indicates are threatened with extinction in all or a significant portion of their range.

Although most of these sponges average only about one-half inch in diameter, some grow to more than a foot. Because of their simple cellular structure, sponges are extensively used in medical and biological investigations. The Carolina sponge is one of the few freshwater species that will survive for any period of time in the laboratory.

Sponges are filter feeders and help to clean the water while providing habitat for countless microscopic animals. The decline in the sponge population is thought to be caused by modification of habitat since increased siltation and pollution of rivers are a result of urbanization.

The Department is seeking the views of the Governors of the States where the sponges are found. Other interested individuals are invited to submit factual information concerning the sponges to the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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